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IMPORTANCE

OF

FAMILY-RELIGION

STATED AND ENFORCED.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED BY J. RITCHIE,

FOR THE SOCIETY FOR PUBLISHING RELIGIOUS
TRACTS.

1798.



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IMPORTANCE
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FAMILY-RELIGION
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THAT masters of families, who profess to be the disciples of Jesus, should maintain the worship of God in their houses, and give the example of its power and influence, is a truth which will not be called in question. It is the object of this tract, the greater part of which is borrowed from the pious Mr. Matthew Henry, to state the importance of family-religion, and to urge it on the conscience of the reader.

It is the duty of the people of God, with themselves, to give up their houses to the Lord, to be to him for a name and a people. All the interest we have, both in our relations, and in our possessions, must be consecrated to God; as under the law, all that the servant had was his master's for ever, after he had consented to have his ear bored to the door post. When God effectually called Abram out of Ur of the Caldees, a great change appeared in his family; for in obedience to God's precept, and in dependence on God's promise, they took all the substance they had gathered, and the souls they had gotten, and put themselves and their all under the divine conduct and government, Gen. xii. 5. How pleasant, when all the members of the family yield themselves to God, subscribe with their hands to be the Lord's, and surname themselves by the name of Israel; and when the

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master of the family, with himself, gives up all his right, title, and interest, in his house, and all that belongs to it, unto God, to be used for him, and disposed of by him.

More than once in the Old Testament, we read of the dedication of private houses to God. It is indeed spoken of as a common practice, Duet. xx. 5. *What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it ? i. e.* taken possession of it. In the doing of which, it was usual to dedicate it to God by some solemn acts of religious worship. The 30th Psalm is entitled, *A psalm or song at the dedication of the house of David.* It is a good thing, when a man hath a house of his own, thus to dedicate it to the service and honour of God, that it may be a Bethel, a house of God, and not a Bethaven, a house of vanity and iniquity. Every Christian that is an householder, no doubt doth this habitually and virtually ; having first given his own self to the Lord, he freely surrenders all he hath to him : but it may be of use to do it actually and expressly, and often to repeat this act of resignation, *This stone which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house*, Gen. xxviii. 22. Let all I have in my house, and all I-do in it, be for the glory of God ; I own him to be my great landlord, and I hold all from and under him ; to him I promise to offer up daily praises and thanksgivings ; and to do the easy services of Gospel obedience. Let *Holiness to the Lord* be written upon the house and all the furniture of it, according to the word which God hath spoken, Zech. xiv. 20, 21. *That every pot in Jerusalem and Judah, shall be holiness to the Lord of hosts.* Let God by his providence dispose of the affairs of my family, and by his grace dispose the affections of all in my family, according to his will, to his own praise. Let me and mine be *his* only, wholly, and for ever.

Masters of families, who preside in the other affairs of the house, must go before their households in the things of God. They must be as prophets, priests, and kings, in their own families, and as such they must keep up family doctrine, family worship, and family discipline.

First, Keep up family doctrine. It is not enough that you are baptized into the Christian faith, and profess to own the truth as it is in Jesus, but care must be taken,

and means used, that you and yours be well acquainted with that truth, and that you *grow* in that acquaintance, to the honour of Christ, and his holy religion, and the improvement of your own minds, and theirs that are under your charge. You must dwell with your families as men of knowledge, 1 Pet. iii. 7. *i. e.* as men that desire to grow in knowledge yourselves, and to communicate your knowledge for the benefit of others, which are the two good properties of those that deserve to be called men of knowledge.

That you may keep up family doctrine,

1. You must *read the Scriptures* to your families, in a solemn manner, requiring their attendance on your reading, and their attention to it; and enquiring sometimes whether they understand what you read? I hope there are none of you without Bibles in your houses, every one a Bible. Thanks be to God we have them cheap and common, in a language that we understand. The book of the law is not such a rarity with us, as it was in Josiah's time. We need not *fetch this knowledge from afar, nor send from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth, to seek the knowledge of God; no the word is nigh us.* When popery reigned in our land, English Bibles were scarce; a load of hay (it is said) was once given for one torn leaf of a Bible. But now Bibles are easily purchased. It is better to be without bread in your houses, than without Bibles; for *the words of God's mouth* are, and should be to you *more than your necessary food.*

But what will it avail you to have Bibles in your houses, if you do not use them? To have the great things of God's law and gospel written to you, if you count them as a strange thing? You look daily into your shop books, and perhaps converse much with the news-papers; and shall your Bibles be thrown by as an almanack out of date? It is not now penal to read the Scriptures in your families, as it was in the dawning of the day of reformation from popery, when there were those that were accused and prosecuted for reading in a certain great heretical book, called an English Bible. The Philistines do not now *stop up these wells*, (as Gen. xxvi. 18.) nor do the shepherds drive away your flocks from them (as

Exod. ii. 17.) nor are they as a spring shut up or a fountain sealed. You have also variety of excellent helps to understand the Scripture, and to improve your reading of it; and, above all, God hath promised to *give his Holy Spirit* to lead you by the Scriptures into the knowledge of the truth; so that if you or yours perish for lack of this knowledge, as you certainly will if you persist in the neglect of it, you may thank yourselves, the guilt will ly wholly at your own doors.

Let me therefore with all earnestness press it upon you, to make the solemn reading of the Scriptures a part of your daily worship in your families. When you speak to God by prayer, be willing to hear him speak to you in his word, that there may be a communion between God and you. This will add much to the solemnity of your family worship, and will make the transaction the more awful and serious, if it be done in a right manner; which will conduce much to the honour of God, and your own and your families edification. It will help to make the word of God familiar to yourselves, and your children and servants, that you may be ready and mighty in the Scriptures, and may from thence be thoroughly furnished unto every good word and work. It will likewise furnish you with matter and words for prayer, and so be helpful to you in other parts of the service. If some parts of Scripture seem less edifying, let those be more frequently read that are most so. David's psalms are of daily use in devotion, and Solomon's proverbs in conversation; it will be greatly to your advantage to be well versed in them. And I hope, I need not press any Christian to the study of the New Testament, nor any Christian parents to the instructing of their children in the pleasant and profitable histories of the Old Testament. When you only hear your children read the Bible, they are tempted to look upon it as no more but a school book; but when they hear you read it to them in a solemn, religious manner, it comes, as it ought, with more authority. Those masters of families who make conscience of doing this, daily, morning and evening, reckoning it part of that which the duty of every day requires, I am sure, have comfort and satisfaction in so doing, and find it contributes much to their own im-

provement in Christian knowledge, and the edification of those that dwell under their shadow. The seasonable reading other good books will also contribute very much to family instruction.

2. You must also catechise your children and servants, so long as they continue to need this milk. Advise them to learn select passages of Scripture, and some good catechism, by heart, and by familiar discourse, help them to understand them. It is an excellent method of catechising, which God himself directs us to, Deut. vi. 7. *To teach our children the things of God, by talking of them as we sit in the house, and go by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise up.* It is good to keep up stated times for this service, and to be constant in them, as those that know how industrious the enemy is, to *sow tares, while men sleep.* If this good work be not kept going forward, it will of itself go backward. Wisdom also will direct you to manage your catechising, as well as the other branches of family-religion, so as not to make it a task and burden, but as much as may be a pleasure to those under your charge, that the blame may ly wholly upon their own impiety, and not at all upon your imprudence, if they should say, *Behold what a weariness is it!*

A religious family may be termed the nursery in which the trees of righteousness are reared, that afterwards are *planted in the courts of our God.* Public catechising will turn to little account without family-catechising. The labour of ministers in instructing youth, therefore proves to many labour in vain, because masters of families do not do their duty, in preparing them for public instruction, and examining their improvement by it. As mothers are childrens best nurses, so parents are or should be their best teachers. Solomon's father was his tutor, Prov. iv. 3, 4. And he never forgot the lessons his *mother taught him*, Prov. xxxi. 1.

Consider what your children are *now* capable of, even in the days of their childhood. They are capable of receiving impressions now, which may abide upon them while they live. The hosannas even of children, taught by the Spirit of God, will be the perfecting of praise, and highly pleasing to the Lord Jesus.

Consider what your children are designed for (we hope) in this world; they should be a *seed to serve the Lord*, which shall be *accounted to him for a generation*. They are to bear up the name of Christ in their day, and into their hands must be transmitted that good thing, which is committed to us. They are to be praising God on earth, when we are praising him in heaven. Let them then be brought up accordingly, that they may answer the end of their birth and being. They are designed for the service of their generation, and to do good in their day; consult then the public welfare, and let nothing be wanting on your parts to qualify them for being useful.

Consider especially what they are designed for in another world. They are made for eternity. Every child thou hast, hath a precious and immortal soul, that must be for ever either in heaven or hell, according as it is prepared in this present state. Perhaps it must remove to that world of spirits very shortly; and will it not be very sad, if through your carelessness and neglect, your children should learn the ways of sin, and perish eternally in those ways? Give them warning, that, if possible, you may deliver their souls, at least, that you may deliver your own, and may not bring their curse and God's too, their blood and your own too, upon your heads.

I know you cannot give grace to your children, nor is a religious conversation, the constant consequence of a religious education; *the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*. But if you make conscience of doing your duty, by keeping up family doctrine; if you teach them the good and the right way, and warn them of by-paths; if you reprove, exhort and encourage them as there is occasion, if you pray with them, and for them, and set them a good example, and at last consult their soul's welfare in the disposal of them, you have done your part, and may comfortably leave the issue and success with God.

Secondly, Keep up family-worship. You must not only as prophets, teach your families, but as priests, must go before them, in offering up the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise. Herein likewise you must

tread in the steps of faithful Abraham ; whose sons you are while thus you do well. You must not only, like him, instruct your household, but, like him, you must with them, *call on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God*, Gen. xxi. 33. Wherever he *pitched his tent*, there he *built an altar unto the Lord*, Gen. xii. 7, 8. xiii. 7, 18. Though he was yet in an unsettled state, but a stranger, and a sojourner ; though he was among jealous and envious neighbours, for the Canaanite and the Perizzite *dwelt then in the land* ; yet wherever Abraham had a tent, God had an altar in it, and he himself served at that altar. Herein he has left us an example.

Families, as such, have many errands at the throne of grace, which furnish them with matter and occasion for family-prayer every day. Errands which cannot be done so well in secret or public, but are fittest to be done by the family in consort, and apart from other families. And it is good for those that go before the rest in family-devotion, ordinarily to dwell most upon the concerns of those that join in their family-capacity, that it may be indeed a family-prayer, not only offered in and by the family, but suited to it. In this and other services, we should endeavour not only to say something, but something to the purpose. .

Five things especially you should have upon your heart in your family prayer, and should endeavour to bring something of each, more or less, into every prayer with your families.

1. You ought to make family-acknowledgments of your dependence upon God and his providence, as a family. Our great business in all acts of religious worship is, to *give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name* ; and this we must do in our family-worship. Give honour to God as the founder of families by his ordinance, because *it was not good for man to be alone* ; as the founder of your families by his providence, for he it is that *buildeth the house, and setteth the solitary in families*. Give honour to him as the owner and ruler of families ; acknowledge that you and yours are his, under his government, and at his disposal, as *the sheep of his pasture*. Especially adore him, as the God of all the families of Israel, in covenant-relation to them, and having

a particular concern for them above others, Jer. xxxi. 1. Give honour to the great Redeemer, as the head over all things to the church, Eph. i. 22. Call him the master of the family, and the great upholder and benefactor of it; for he it is *in whom all the families of the earth are blessed*, Gen. xii. 3. All family- blessings are owing to Christ, and come to us through his hand, by his blood. Own your dependence upon God, and your obligations to Christ, for all good things pertaining both to life and godliness, and making conscience of paying homage to your chief Lord, and never set up a title to any of your enjoyments in competition to his.

2. You ought to make family- confessions of your sins against God; those sins you have committed in your family- capacity. We read in Scripture of the *iniquity of the house*, as of *Eli's*, 1 Sam. iii. 13, 14.; iniquity visited upon their children; sins that bring wrath upon families, and a curse that *enters into the house to consume it, with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof*, Zech. v. 4. How concerned was Job because of the sins of his children, chap. i. 5.

Even those families, that are not polluted with gross and scandalous sins, have need to join every day in solemn repentance before God for their sins of daily infirmity. Their vain words and unprofitable converse among themselves; their manifold defects in relative duties, provoking one anothers lusts and passions, instead of provoking one another to love and to good works. These ought to be confessed and bewailed by the family together, that God may be glorified, and what has been amiss may be amended for the future. It was not only in a time of great and extraordinary repentance that families mourned apart, Zech. xii. 11. but in the stated returns of the day of expiation the priest was particularly to make atonement for his household, Lev. xvi. 17. The best families, and those in which piety and love prevails most, yet in many things come short, and do enough every day to bring them upon their knees at night.

3. You ought to offer up family- thanksgivings for the blessings which you, with your families, receive from God. Many are the mercies of which you enjoy the

sweetness and benefit in common; and if these mercies were wanting to one, all the family would be sensible of it. Hath not God *made a hedge of protection about you and your houses, and all that you have?* Job i. 10. Hath he not created a defence upon *every dwelling-place of Mount Zion*, as well as upon *her assemblies?* Isa. iv.

5. The dreadful alarms of a storm, and the desolations made, as by a fire, once in an age, should make us sensible of our obligations to the divine providence, for our preservation from tempests and fire every day, and every night. *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed*, and buried in the ruins of our houses. When the whole family comes together safe in the morning, from their respective retirements, and when they return safe at night, from their respective employments, there having been no disaster, no adversary, no evil occurrence, it is so reasonable, and (as I may say) so natural for them to join together in solemn thanksgivings to their great protector, that I wonder how any that believe in a God, and a providence, can omit it. Have you not health in your family, sickness kept or taken from the midst of you? Doth not God bring plentifully into your hands, and increase your substance? Have you not your table spread, and your cup running over, and manna rained about your tents? and doth not the whole family share in the comfort of all this? shall not then the voice of thanksgiving be in those tabernacles, where the *voice of rejoicing is?* Psal. cxviii. 15. Is the *vine by the house-side* fruitful and flourishing, and the *olive plants round the table* green and growing? Are family-relations comfortable, and agreeable, not broken, nor imbittered? And shall not that God be acknowledged herein, who makes every creature to be that to us that it is? Shall not the God of your mercies, your family-mercies, be the God of your praises, your family-praises, and that daily?

The benefit and honour of your being Christian families, your having in God's house, and within his walls, a place, and a name, better than that of sons and daughters, and the salvation this brings to your house, furnisheth you with abundant matter for joint thanksgivings. *You hath he known above all the families of the earth*, and therefore he expects in a special manner to be owned by

you. Of all houses, the house of Israel, the house of Aaron, and the house of Levi, have most reason to bless the Lord, and to say, that his mercy endureth for ever.

4. You ought to present your family-petitions for the mercy and grace of which your families stand in need. Daily bread is received by families together, and we are taught, not only to pray for it every day, but to pray together for it, saying, Our Father, give it us. There are affairs and employments of which the family is jointly concerned in the success, and, therefore, should jointly ask of God, wisdom for the management of them, and prosperity therein. There are family-cares to be cast upon God by prayer, family-comforts to be sought for, and family-crosses of which they should together beg for the sanctification and removal. Hereby your children will be more effectually possessed with a belief of, and regard to, the divine providence, than by all the instructions you can give them, which will look best in their eye, when thus reduced to practice by your daily acknowledging God in all your ways.

You desire that God will give wisdom and grace to your children; you travel in birth again till you see Christ formed in them, you pray for them; it is well, but it is not enough; you must pray with them; let them hear you pray to God for a blessing upon the good instructions and counsels you give them; it may perhaps put them upon praying for themselves, and increase their esteem both of you, and of the good lessons you teach them. You would have your servants diligent and faithful, and this perhaps would help to make them so. Masters do not give to their servants that which is just and equal, if they do not continue in prayer with them.

There are some temptations which families, as such, ly open to. Busy families are in temptation to worldliness, and neglect of religious duties; mixed families are in temptation to discord, and mutual jealousies; decaying families are in temptation to distrust, discontent, and indirect courses, to help themselves; they should therefore not only watch, but pray together, that they be not overcome by the temptations to which they are exposed.

There are family- blessings which God hath promised, and for which he will be fought unto. These joint blessings must be sued out by joint prayers. There is a special blessing which God commands upon families that *dwell together in unity*, Psal. cxxxiii. 1. 3. which they must seek for by prayer. Where God commands the blessing, we must beg the blessing. God by promise blesteth David's house, and therefore David by prayer blesteth it too, 2 Sam. vi. 20.

5. You ought also to make family intercession for others. There are families you stand related to, or which by neighbourhood, friendship or acquaintance, you become interested in, and concerned for, and these you should recommend in your prayers to the grace of God, and your family that are joined with you in the alliances, should join with you in those prayers. Evil tidings perhaps are received from relations at a distance, which are the grief of the family ; God must then be fought unto by the family for succour and deliverance. Some of the branches of the family are perhaps in distant countries, and in dangerous circumstances, and you are solicitous about them ; it will be a comfort to yourselves, and will be of advantage to them, to make mention of them daily in your family-prayers. The benefit of prayer will reach far, because he that hears prayer, can extend his hand of power and mercy to the utmost corners of the earth, and to them that are afar off upon the sea.

In the public peace likewise, we and our families have peace ; and therefore we should pray for the peace of the land in which we dwell. We must make supplication for *kings and all in authority*, 1 Tim. ii. 2,---8. we must bear upon our hearts the concerns of God's church abroad, especially the suffering parts of it. Thus keeping up a spiritual communion with all the families that in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus.

In a word, Let us go by this rule in our family-devotions ; whatever is the matter of our care, let it be the matter of our prayer ; and let us allow no care, which we cannot in faith spread before God : and whatever is the matter of our rejoicing, let it be the matter of our

thanksgiving; and let us withhold our hearts from all those joys, which do not dispose us for the duty of praise.

Under this head of family-worship, I must not omit to recommend to you the singing of God's praise in your families, as a part of daily worship, especially Sabbath worship. This is a part of religious worship, which participates both of the word and prayer; for therein we are not only to give glory to God, but to teach and admonish one another; it is therefore very proper to make it a transition, from the one to the other. It will warm and quicken you, refresh and comfort you, and perhaps, if you have little children in your houses, they will sooner take notice of it, than of any other part of your family-devotion; and some good impressions may thereby be fastened upon them.

Thirdly, Keep up family-discipline. Reason teacheth us, that *every man should bear rule in his own house*, Esther i. 22. And since that, as well as other power, is of God, it ought to be employed for God; and they that so rule, must be just, ruling in fear. Joshua looked further than the acts of religious worship, when he made that pious resolution, *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*, Joshua xxiv. 15. For we do not serve him in sincerity and truth, (which is the service he there speaks of, ver. 14.) if we and ours serve him only on our knees, and do not take care to serve him in the whole of our deportment. Those only that have *clean hands, and a pure heart, are accounted the generation of them that seek God*, Psal. xxiv. 4,--6. And without this, those that pretend to seek God daily, do but mock him, Isa. lviii. 2.

The authority God hath given you over your children and servants, is principally designed for this end, that you may thereby bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. If you use it only to oblige them to do your will, and so serve your pride, and to do your business, thus serving your worldliness, you do not answer the great end of your being invested with it. You must use it for God's honour, by it to endeavour to teach them to do the will of God, and to mind the business of religion. Holy David not only blessed

his household, but took care to keep good order in it ; as appears by that plan of his family-discipline, which we have in the 101st psalm. A psalm which Mr Fox tells us, that blessed martyr, Bishop Ridley, often read to his family, as the rule by which he resolved to govern it.

You are made keepers of the vineyard, be faithful to your trust, and carefully watch over those that are under your charge, knowing you must give account.

1. Countenance every thing that is good and praiseworthy in your children and servants. It is as much your duty to commend and encourage those in your family that do well, as to reprove and admonish those that do amiss ; and if you take delight only in blaming that which is culpable, and are backward to praise that which is laudable, you give occasion to suspect something of an ill nature not becoming a good man, much less a good Christian. It should be a trouble to us, when we have a reproof to give, but a pleasure to us to say with the apostle, 1 Cor. xi. 2. *Now I praise you.*

Most people will be easier led than driven, and we all love to be spoken fair : When you see any thing that is hopeful and promising in your inferiors, any thing of a towardly and tractable disposition, much more any thing of a pious affection to the things of God, you should therefore contrive to encourage it. Smile upon them when you see them set their faces heavenwards, and take the first opportunity to let them know you observe it, and are pleased with it, and do not despise the day of small things. This will quicken them to continue and abound in that which is good, it will fortify them against the difficulties they see in their way, and perhaps may turn the wavering trembling scale the right way, and effectually determine their resolutions to cleave to the Lord. When you see them desirous to come to family-worship, attentive to the word, devout in prayer, industrious to get knowledge, afraid of sin, and careful to do their duty, let *them* have the praise of it, for you have the comfort of it, and God must have all the glory. Draw them with the cords of a man, hold them with the bands of love ; so shall your rebukes, when they are necessary, be the more acceptable and effectual.

The great Shepherd gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom, and gently leads them, and so should you.

2. Discountenance every thing that is evil in your children and servants. Use your authority for the preventing of sin, and the suppressing of every root of bitterness, lest it spring up, and trouble you, and thereby many be defiled. Frown upon every thing that brings sin into your families, and introduceth any ill words, or ill practices. Pride and passion, strife and contention, idleness and intemperance, lying and slander, are sins which you must not connive at, nor suffer to go without a rebuke. If you return to the Almighty, this among other things is required of you, that you put away iniquity, all iniquity, these and other the like iniquities, *far from your tabernacles*, Job xxii. 23. Make it to appear, that in the government of your families, you are more jealous for God's honour, than for your own authority and interest, and shew yourselves more displeased at that which is an offence to God, than at that which is only an affront or damage to yourselves.

You must indeed be careful not to provoke your children to wrath, lest they be discouraged; and as to your servants, it is your duty to forbear on moderate threatening; yet you must also with holy zeal and resolution, and the meekness of wisdom, keep good order in your families, and set no wicked thing before your eyes, but witness against it. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Be afraid of having wicked servants in your houses, lest your children learn their way, and get a snare to their souls. Drive away with an angry countenance all that evil communication which corrupts good manners, that your houses may be habitations of righteousness, and sin may never find shelter in them.

I come now, *Secondly*, to offer some motives to persuade you to promote religion in your families. And O that I could find out acceptable words, with which to reason with you so as to prevail. Suffer me a little, and I will shew you what is to be said on God's behalf, which is worth your consideration.

First, If your families be devoted to the fear of God, he will graciously make his abode with you. It is a

very desireable thing, to have the gracious presence of God with us in our families, that presence which is promised where two or three are gathered together in his name. This was it that David was so desirous of, Psal. ci. 2. *O when wilt thou come unto me!* His palace, his court, would be as a prison, as a dungeon, to him, if God did not come to him, and dwell with him, in it; and cannot your hearts witness to this desire? You that have houses of your own, would you not have God come to you, and dwell with you, in them? Invite him then, beg his presence, court his stay. Nay, he invites himself to your houses, by the offer of his favour and grace. Behold he stands at your door, and knocks. It is the voice of your beloved, open to him, and bid him welcome; meet him with your hosannas; blessed is he that cometh. He cometh peaceably, he brings a blessing with him, a blessing which he will cause to rest upon the habitations of the righteous, Ezek. xlv. 30. He will command a blessing which will amount to no less than life for evermore, Psal. cxxxiii. 3. This presence and blessing of God will make your relations comfortable, your affairs successful, your enjoyments sweet, and behold by it all things are made clean to you. This will make your family comforts double comforts, and your family crosses but half crosses; it will turn a tent into a temple, a cottage into a palace. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, are the houses in which God dwells.

Now, the way to have God's presence with you in your houses is, to furnish them for his entertainment. Thus the good Shunammite invited the prophet Elisha to the chamber she had prepared for him, by accommodating him there with *a bed and a table, a stool and a candlestick*, 2 Kings iv. 10. Would you furnish your houses for the presence of God, it is not expected that you furnish them as his tabernacle was furnished of old, with blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linnen, but set up and keep up for him a throne, and an altar, that from the altar you and yours may give glory to him, and from the throne he may give law to you and yours, and then you may be sure of his presence and blessing, and may solace yourselves from day to day in the comfort of it. God will be with you in a way of mercy, while you

are with him in a way of duty ; if you seek him, he will be found of you. The secret of God shall be in your tabernacle, as it was in Job's, chap. xxix. 4. as it is with the righteous, Psal. xxv. 14. Prov. iii. 32, 33.

Secondly, If your houses are devoted to God, he will make them little sanctuaries ; nay, he will himself be to you a little sanctuary, Ezek. xi. 16. The way to be safe in your houses, is to keep up religion and the fear of God in your houses ; so shall you dwell on high, and *the place of your defence shall be the munitions of rocks*, Isa. xxxiii. 16. The law looks upon a man's house as his castle, religion makes it truly so. If God's grace be the glory in the midst of the house, his providence will make a wall of fire round about it, Zech. ii. 5. Satan found it his confusion, that God made a hedge about pious Job, about his house, and about all that he had on every side, so that he could not find one gap by which to break in upon him, Job i. 10. Every dwelling place of Mount Sion shall be protected, as the tabernacle was in the wilderness, for God hath promised, to create upon it *a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night*, which shall be *a defence upon all the glory*, Isa. iv. 5. If we thus devote ourselves to the service of God all the days of our life, by making our houses his houses, we shall be hid in his pavilion, in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide us, Psal. xxvii. 4, 5.

Wherever we encamp under the banner of Christ, the angels of God will encamp round about us, and pitch their tents, where we pitch ours ; and we frequently lose the impression, how much we owe it to the ministration of the good angels, that we and ours are preserved from the malice of evil angels, who are continually seeking to do mischief to good people. There are terrors which fly by night and by day, which they only that abide under the shadow of the Almighty can promise themselves to be safe from, Psal. xci. 1, 5. Would you insure your houses by the best policy of insurance, let them be houses devoted to God, and then they shall be taken under the special protection of him that keeps Israel, and neither slumbers nor sleeps ; and if any damage come to them, it shall be made up in grace and glory. The way of duty is without doubt the way of safety.

Praying families are kept from more mischiefs than they themselves are aware of. They are not always sensible of the distinction which a kind providence makes between them and others; though God is pleased sometimes to make it remarkable, as in the story which is credibly related of a certain village in the Canton of Bern in Switzerland, consisting of ninety houses, which in the year 1584, was all destroyed by an earthquake, except one house, in which the good man and his family were at that time together praying. That promise is sure to all the seed of faithful Abraham, *Fear not, I am thy shield*, Gen. xv. 1. Wisdom herself hath passed her word for it, Prov. i. 33. *Who so hearkeneth unto me, wherever he dwells, he shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of all real evil itself, and from the amazing, tormenting fear of evil.* Nothing can hurt, nothing need frighten, those whom God protects.

Thirdly, If your house be not a truly religious house, it is to be feared Satan will have a seat there. If religion do not rule your families, sin and wickedness will rule. *I know where thou dwellest*, (saith Christ to the angel of the church of Pergamos, Rev. ii. 13.) *even where Satan's seat is*; that was his affliction; but there are many whose sin it is; by their irreligion and immorality they allow Satan a seat in their houses, and that seat a throne. They are very willing that the strong man armed should keep his palace there, and that his goods should be at peace. It is commonly said, that where God hath a church, the devil will have his chapel; but it may more truly be said in this case, Where God hath not a church, the devil will have his chapel. If the unclean spirit find the house in this sense empty, empty of good, though it be swept and garnished, he taketh to himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there.

Terrible stories have been told of houses haunted by the devil, and of the fear people have had of dwelling in such houses; verily those houses in which rioting and drunkenness reign, in which swearing and cursing are the language of the house, or in which the more spiritual wickedness of pride, malice, covetousness and deceit,

have the ascendancy, may truly be said to be haunted by the devil, and they are most uncomfortable houses for any man to live in: They are *holds of foul spirits, and cages of unclean and hateful birds*, even as Babylon the great will be when it is fallen, Rev. xviii. 2.

Now, the way to keep sin out of the house, is, to keep up religion in the house, which will be the most effectual antidote against Satan's poison. When Abraham thought concerning Abimelech's house, *Surely the fear of God is not in this place*, he concluded no less, but they would kill him for his wife's sake, Gen. xx. 11. Where no fear of God is, no reading, no praying, no devotion, what can one expect but all that is bad? Where there is impiety, there will be immorality; they that restrain prayer, cast off fear, Job xv. 4. But if religious worship have its place in the house, it may be hoped that vice will not have its place there. There is much of truth in that saying of good Mr Dod, *Either praying will make a man give over sinning, or sinning will make a man give over praying*. Though there be a struggle between Christ and Belial in your houses, and the assaults of sin and Satan are daring and threatening, yet as long as religion keeps the field, and the weapons of its warfare are made use of, we may hope the enemy will lose ground.

Fourthly, True religion will make your houses very comfortable to yourselves. Nothing is more agreeable to a gracious soul, than constant communion with a gracious God; it is the one thing it desires, to dwell in the house of the Lord; here it is as in its element, it is its rest for ever. If therefore our houses be houses of the Lord, we shall for that reason love home, reckoning our daily devotion, the sweetest of our daily delights; and our family worship, the most valuable of our family comforts. This will sanctify to us all the conveniences of our house, and reconcile us to the inconveniences of it. What are Solomon's gardens and orchards, and pools of water, and the other delights of the sons of men, (Eccl. ii. 5, 6, 8.) in comparison with these delights of the children of God?

Family-religion will help to make our family-relations comfortable to us, by promoting love, preventing quar-

rels, and extinguishing heats that may at any time happen. A family living in the fear of God, and joining daily in religious worship, truly enjoys itself. Behold how good, and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren thus to dwell together; it is not only like ointment and perfume which rejoice the heart, but like the holy ointment, the holy perfume, wherewith Aaron the saint of the Lord was consecrated: not only like the common dew to the grass, but like the dew which descendeth upon the mountain of Sion, the holy mountain, Psal. cxxxiii. 1, 2. The communion of saints in that which is the work of saints, is without doubt the most pleasant communion here on earth, and the liveliest representation, and surest pledge of those everlasting joys, which are the happiness of the spirits of just men made perfect, and the hopes of holy souls in this imperfect state.

Family-religion will make the affairs of the family successful; and though they may not in every thing issue to our mind, yet we may by faith foresee that they will at last issue in our good. If this beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and our families, it will prosper the work of our hands unto us, yea, the work of our hands it will establish; or however, it will establish our hearts in that comfort which makes every thing that occurs easy, Psal. xc. 17. cxii. 8.

We cannot suppose our mountain to stand so strong, but that it will be moved; trouble in the flesh we must expect, and affliction in that from which we promise ourselves most comfort; and when the divine providence makes our houses *houses of mourning*, then it will be comfortable to have them *houses of prayer*, and to have had them so before. When sickness, and sorrow, and death, come into our families, (and sooner or later they will come) it is good that they should find the wheels of prayer agoing, and the family accustomed to seek God; for if we are then to begin this good work when distress forceth us to it, we shall drive heavily in it. They that pray *constantly* when they are well, may pray *comfortably* when they are sick.

Fifthly, Family-religion will be a good legacy; nay, it will be a good inheritance, to be left to your children after you. Reason directs us to consult the welfare of

posterity, and to lay up in store a good foundation for those that shall come after us to build upon, and we cannot do this better, than by keeping up religion in our houses. A family-altar will be the best entail; your children will for this rise up and call you blessed; and it may be hoped, they will be praising God for you, and praising God like you, here on earth, when you are praising him in heaven.

You will hereby leave your children the benefit of many prayers put up to heaven for them, which will be kept (as it were) upon the file there, to be answered to their comfort, when you are silent in the dust. It is true of prayer, what we say of winter, It never rots in the skies. The seed of Jacob know they do not seek in vain, though perhaps they live not to see their prayers answered. Some good Christians that have made conscience of praying daily with and for their children, have been encouraged to hope that the children of so many prayers should not miscarry at last; and thus encouraged, Joseph's dying word hath been the language of many a dying Christian's faith, *I die, but God will surely visit you*, Gen. l. 24.

You will likewise hereby leave your children a good example, which you may hope they will follow, when they come into houses of their own. The usage and practice of families is commonly transmitted from one generation to another; bad customs are many times thus entailed: They that *burnt incense to the queen of heaven*, learnt it of *their fathers*, Jer. xlv. 17. And a *vain conversation* was thus *received by tradition*, 1 Pet. i. 18. And why may not good customs be in like manner handed down to posterity? Thus we should make known the ways of God *to our children*, that they may *arise and declare them to their children*, Psal. lxxviii. 6.

Sixthly, Family-religion will contribute very much to the prosperity of the church of God. This is that, which I hope, we are all hearty well-wishers to; setting aside the consideration of parties, and separate interests, and burying all names of distinction in the grave of Christian charity, we earnestly desire to see true Catholic Christianity, and serious godliness in the power of it, prevailing and flourishing in our land; to see knowledge fil-

ling the land, as the waters cover the sea ; to see holiness and love giving law, and triumphing over sin and strife ; we would see cause to call your city, a city of righteousness, a faithful city, its walls salvation, and its gates praise. Now all this would in all probability be effected, if family-religion were generally set up, and kept up.

When the wall was to be built about Jerusalem, it was presently done by this expedient, every one undertook to repair *over against his own house*, See Neh. iii. 10, &c. And if ever the decayed walls of the gospel Jerusalem be built up, it must be by the same method. We cannot better serve our country, than by keeping up religion in our families.

Let families be well catechised, and then the public preaching of the word will be the more profitable, and the more successful. For want of this, when we speak never so plainly of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, to the most we do but speak parables. The book of the Lord is delivered to them that are not catechised, saying, Read this, and they say, We are not learned ; learned enough in other things, but not in the one thing needful, Isa. xxix. 12. But our work is easy with those, that, from their childhood, have known the holy scriptures.

If every family were a praying family, public prayers would be the better joined with, more intelligently, and more affectionately ; for the more we are used to prayer the more expert we shall be in that holy and divine art of entering into the holiest. And public reproofs and admonitions would by the blessing of God, be as a nail in a sure place, if masters of families would second them with their family-discipline.

Religious families are blessings to the neighbourhood they live in, at least by their prayers. A good man thus becomes a public good, and it is his ambition to be so. Though he see his children's children, he has small joy of that, if he do not see peace upon Israel, Psal. cxxviii. 3, 6. And therefore postponing all his own interests and satisfactions, he sets himself to seek the good of Jerusalem all the days of his life. Happy were we, if we had many such.

That which now remains is, to address you upon the whole matter by way of exhortation ; and I pray you, let my counsel be acceptable to you ; and while I endeavour to give every one his portion, let your consciences assist me herein, and take to yourselves that which belongs to you.

First, Let those masters of families that have hitherto lived in the neglect of family-religion, be persuaded now to set it up, and from henceforward to make conscience of it. I know it is hard to persuade people to begin even a good work that they have not been used to ; yet if God by his grace set in with this word, who can tell but some may be wrought upon to comply with the design of it ? We have no ill design in urging you to this part of your duty : we aim not at the advantage of a party, but purely at the prosperity of your families. We are sure we have reason on our side, and if you will but suffer that to rule you, we shall gain our point, and you will all go home firmly resolved, as Joshua was, that whatever others do, and whatever they say of you, you and your houses will serve the Lord. God put it into, and keep it in, the imagination of the thought of your heart, and establish your way therein before him.

Proceed in the right method ; first, set up Christ upon the throne in your hearts, and then Christ will rule in your house. Let Christ dwell in your hearts by faith, and then let him dwell in your houses ; you do not begin at the right end of your work, if you do not first give your own selves unto the Lord. God had respect first to Abel, and then to his offering. Let the fear and love of God rule in your hearts, and have a commanding sway and empire there, and then set up an altar for God in your tents ; for you cannot do that acceptably, till you have first consecrated yourselves as spiritual priests to God, to serve at that altar.

And when your hearts, like Lydia's, are opened to Christ, let your houses, like hers, be opened to him too, Acts xvi. 14, 15. Let those that have the richest, and best furnished houses, reckon religion in them to be their best ornament. Let those that have houses of the greatest care and business, reckon family-religion their best employment, and not neglect the one thing needful, while

they are careful and cumbered about many things: Nor let those that have mean habitations be discouraged. The ark of God long dwelt in curtains. The Lord visits the cottages of his people with his gracious presence, while he passes by the palaces of kings, whose hearts are not in subjection to the King of kings.

Would you keep up your authority in your family? You cannot do it better, than by keeping up religion in your family. If ever a master of a family looks great, truly great, it is when he is going before his house in the service of God, and presiding among them in holy things. Then he shews himself worthy of double honour, when he teacheth them the good knowledge of the Lord, and is their mouth to God in prayer, blessing them in the name of God.

Would you have your family-relations comfortable, your affairs successful and give an evidence of your professed subjection to the gospel of Christ? Would you live in God's fear, and die in his favour, and escape that curse that is entailed on prayerless families? Let religion in the power of it, have its due place; that is, the uppermost place in your houses.

Many objections your own corrupt hearts will make against family religion, but they will appear frivolous and trifling to a pious mind, that is stedfastly resolved for God and godliness; You will never go on in your way to heaven, if you will be frightened with lions in the street. Whatever is the difficulty you dread, the discouragement you apprehend in it, I am confident it is not insuperable, it is not unanswerable. But he that observes the wind, shall not sow; and he that regards the clouds, shall not reap.

Be not loth to begin a new custom, if it be a good custom, especially if it be a duty, (as certainly this is) which, while you continue in the neglect of, you live in sin; for omissions are sins, and must come into judgment. It may be, you have been convinced, that you ought to worship God in your families, and that it is a good thing to do so, but you have put it off to some more convenient season. Will you now at last begin it? And do not defer so good a work any longer. The present season is without doubt the most convenient season. Be-

gin this day ; let this be the day of your laying the foundation of the Lord's temple in your house ; and then consider from this day and forward, as God by the prophet reasons with the people who neglected to build the temple, Hag. ii. 18, 19. take notice, whether God do not from this day, remarkably bless you, in all that you have and do.

Plead not your own weakness and inability to perform family worship. You will write what is necessary for the carrying on of your trade, though you cannot write so fine a hand as some others ; and will you not be as wise in the work of your Christian calling, to do your best, though it be far short of the best, rather than not do it at all ? To him that hath but one talent, and trades with that, more shall be given ; but from him that buries it, it shall be taken away. Be at some pains to make the scriptures familiar to you, especially David's Psalms, and then you cannot be to seek for a variety of apt expressions proper to be used in prayer, for they will be always at your right hand. Take with you these words, words which the Holy Ghost teaches, for you cannot find more acceptable words.

And now, shall I prevail with you in this matter ? I am loth to leave you unresolved, or but almost persuaded ; I beg of you for God's sake, for Christ's sake, for your own precious soul's sake, and for the children's sake of your own bodies, that you will live no longer in the neglect of so great, and necessary and comfortable a duty, as this of family-worship. When we press upon you the more inward duties of faith, and love, and the fear of God, it cannot be so evident that we succeed in our errand, as it may be in this. It is certain you get no good by this address, but it is wholly lost upon you, if, after you have read it, you continue in the neglect of family-religion ; and if still you cast off fear and restrain prayer before God. Your families will be witnesses against you, that this work was undone ; and these advices will witness against you, that it was not for want of being called to do it, but for want of a heart to do it, when you were called. But I hope better things of you, my brethren, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak.

Secondly, Let those that have kept up family-worship formerly, but of late have left it off, be persuaded to resume it. This perhaps is the case with some of you; you remember the kindness of your youth, and the love of your espousals; time was, when you sought God daily, and delighted to know his ways, as families that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of your God; but now it is otherwise. The altar of the Lord is broken down and neglected, the daily sacrifice is ceased; and God hath kept an account how many days it hath ceased, whether you have or no, Dan. viii. 13, 14. Now, God comes into your houses seeking fruit, and finds none or next to none; you are so eager in your worldly pursuits, that you have neither hearts nor time for religious exercises. You began at first frequently to omit the service, and a small matter served for an excuse to put it by, and so by degrees it came to nothing.

O that those who have left their first love, would now remember whence they are fallen, and repent, and do their first works. Enquire how this good work came to be neglected; was it not because your love to God cooled, and the love of the world prevailed? Have you not found a manifest decay in the prosperity of your souls, since you gave up this good work? Hath not sin got ground in your hearts, and in your houses? And though when you dropt your family-worship, you promised yourselves, that you would make it up in secret worship, because you would not allow yourselves time for both, yet have you not declined in that also? Are you not less frequent, and less fervent in your closet-devotions too? Where is now the blessedness you have formerly spoken of? I beseech you lay out yourselves to retrieve it in time. Say, as that penitent adulteress, Hos. ii. 7. *I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now.* Cleanse the sanctuary, put away the strange gods; is money the god, or belly the god, that hath gained possession of thy heart and house? Whatever it is, cast it out; repair the altar of the Lord, and begin again the daily sacrifice and oblation. Light the lamps again and burn the incense. Seriously resolve it shall never be neglected again as it hath been. Perhaps you and your families have been manifestly under the

rebukes of providence since you left off your duty, as Jacob was while he neglected to pay his vow. I beseech you at length hear the voice of the rod, and of him who hath appointed it, for it reminds you of your forgotten vows, saying, *Arise go up to Bethel and dwell there*, Gen. xxxv. 1. Let the place thou dwellest in, ever be a Bethel, so shall God dwell with thee there.

Thirdly, Let those that are remiss and negligent in their family worship, be awakened to more zeal and constancy. Some of you perhaps maintain the profession of religion in your house, but it does not flourish; it is like the church of Laodicea, neither cold nor hot; or like the church of Sardis, in which the things that remain are ready to die. So that it hath little more than a name to live. Something of this work of the Lord is done for fashion-sake, but it is done deceitfully. You have in your flock a male, but you vow and sacrifice to the Lord a corrupt thing. You grow customary in your accustomed services, and bring the torn and the blind, the lame and the sick, for sacrifice; and you offer that to your God, which you would scorn to offer to your governor; and though it is but little you do for the promoting of religion in your house, you think that too much, and say, *Behold what a weariness is it!* You put it off with a small and inconsiderable scantling of your day, and that with the dregs and refuse of it. You can spare no time at all for it in the morning, nor any in the evening, till you are half asleep. It is thrust into a corner, and almost lost in a crowd of worldly business, and carnal converse. When it is done, it is done so slightly, in so much haste, and with so little reverence, that it makes no impression upon yourselves or your families. The Bible lies ready, but you have no time to read. Your servants are otherwise employed, and you think it is no matter for calling them in: you yourselves can take up with a word or two of prayer, or rest in a lifeless, heartless tale of words. Thus it is every day, and perhaps little better on the Lord's days; no repetition of what you have heard through the day, no catechising, no singing of psalms, or none to any purpose.

Is it thus with any of your families? Is this the present state of religion in your house? My brethren, these

things ought not to be so. It is not enough that you do that which is good, but you must do it well. God and religion have in effect no place in your hearts and houses, if they have not the innermost and uppermost place. Christ will come no where to be an underling; he is not a guest to be set behind the door. What comfort, what benefit, can you promise to yourselves from such trifling services as these; from an empty form of godliness, without the power of it?

I beseech you, make a business of your family-religion and not a by-business. Let it be your pleasure and delight, and not a task and drudgery. Contrive your affairs so, as that the most convenient time may be allotted, both morning and evening, for your family worship, so as that you may not be unfit for it, or disturbed and strained in it? Herein wisdom is profitable to direct. Address yourselves to it with reverence and seriousness, and a solemn pause, that those who join with you may see and say, That God is with you of a truth, and may be struck thereby into a like holy awe. You need not be long in the service, but you ought to be lively in it; not slothful in this business, because it is business for God and your souls, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

Fourthly, Let those that keep up the form of religion in their houses, be very careful to adorn and beautify it in their conversation. If you pray in your families, and read the Scriptures, and sing psalms, and yet are passionate and froward with your relations, quarrelsome and contentious with your neighbours, unjust and deceitful in your dealings, intemperate and given to tippling, or allow yourselves in any other sinful way, you pull down with one hand, what you build up with the other. Your prayers will be an abomination to God, and to good men too, if they be thus polluted. Be not deceived, God is not mocked.

See that you be universal in your religion, that it may appear you are sincere in it. Shew that you believe a reality in it, by acting always under the commanding power and influence of it. Be not Christians upon your knees, and Jews in your shops. While you seem saints in your devotions, prove not yourselves sinners in your conversations. Having begun the day in the fear of

God, be in that fear all the day long. Let the example you set your families be throughout good, and by it teach them not only to read and pray, but to be meek and humble, sober and temperate, loving and peaceable, just and honest ; so shall you adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour ; and those that will not be won by the word, shall be won by your conversation. Your family worship is an honour to you, see to it, that neither you nor yours be in any thing a disgrace to it.

Fifthly, Let those that are setting out in the world, worship God in their house at first, and not defer it. Plead not youth and bashfulness ; if you have confidence enough to rule a family, I hope you have confidence enough to pray with a family. Say not, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house shall be built, as they did that dwelt in their ceiled houses, while God's house lay waste, Hag. i. 2,---4. It ought to be built presently, and the longer you put it off, the more difficulty there will be in the doing of it, and the more danger that it will never be done.

Now you are beginning the world, (as you call it), is it not your wisdom, as well as duty, to begin with God ? Can you begin better ? Or can you expect to prosper, if you do not begin thus ? The fuller your heads are of care about setting up house, and setting up shop, and settling in both, the more need you have of daily prayer, that by it you may cast your care on God, and fetch in wisdom and direction from on high.

Sixthly, In all your removes, be sure you carry your religion along with you. Abraham oft removed his tent, but wherever he pitched it, there the first thing he did was to build an altar. It is observable concerning Aquilla and Priscilla, that when Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans, they were at Rome ; for he sends salutations to them thither, and there it is said they had a church in their house, Rom. xvi. 5. But now when he wrote this epistle to the Corinthians, they were at Ephesus, for thence it should seem this epistle bore date, and here he sends salutations from them ; and at Ephesus also they had a church in their house. As wherever we go ourselves, we must take our religion with us ; so

wherever we take our families, or part of them, we must take our family-religion with us ; for in all places we need divine protection, and experience divine goodness. I will therefore, that men pray every where.

When you are in your city-houses, let not the business of them crowd out your family religion ; nor let the diversions of your country-houses indispose your minds to these serious exercises. That care and that pleasure are unseasonable and inordinate, which leave you not both heart and time to attend the service of the Lord in your house.

Let me here be an advocate also for those families whose masters are often absent from them, for their health or pleasure, especially on the Lord's day, or long absent upon business : And let me beg these absent masters to consider *with whom they leave those few sheep in the wilderness*, (1 Sam. xvii. 28.) and whether they do not leave them neglected and exposed. Perhaps there is not a just cause for your absence so much, nor can you give a good answer to that question, *What dost thou here, Elijah ?* But if there be a just cause, you ought to take care that family-religion be not neglected when you are abroad, but that the work be done when you are not at home to do it.

Seventhly, Let inferior relations help to promote religion in the families where they are. If family-worship be not kept up in the houses where you live, let so much the more be done in your closets for God and your souls : If it be, yet think not that will excuse you from secret worship : All is little enough to keep up the life of religion in your hearts, and help you forwards towards heaven.

Let the children of praying parents, and the servants of praying masters, account it a great privilege to live in houses where family-religion is observed, and be careful to improve that privilege. Be you also ready to every good work ; make the religious exercises of your family easy and pleasant to those that perform them, by shewing yourselves forward to attend on them, and careful to attend to them ; for your backwardness and heedlessness will be their greatest discouragement. Let your lives also be a credit to good education, and make it ap-

pear to all with whom you converse, that you are every way the better for living in religious families.

Eighthly, Let solitary people, that are not set in families, be devoted to God in their chambers, in their closets. When every man repaired the wall of Jerusalem over against his own house, we read of one that repaired *over against his chamber*, Neh. iii. 10. Those that live alone out of the way of family-worship, ought to take so much the more time for their secret-worship; and, if possible, add the more solemnity to it. You have not families to read the Scriptures to, read them so much the more to yourselves. You have not children and servants to catechise, nor parents or masters to be catechised by, catechise yourselves then, that you may hold fast the form of sound words, which you have received. *Exhort one another*—So we read it, but it might as well be read, *Exhort yourselves*, Heb. iii. 13. You are not made keepers of the vineyards, and therefore the greater is your shame if your vineyard you do not keep. When you are alone, yet you are not alone, for the Father is with you, to observe what you do, and to own and accept you if you do well.

Ninthly, Let those that are to choose a settlement, consult the welfare of their souls in the choice. If family-religion be so necessary, so comfortable, then be not unequally yoked with unbelievers, who will have no kindness for family religion, nor assist in the support of it, but instead of building this house, pluck it down with their hands, Prov. xiv. 1. Let apprenticeships and other services be chosen by this rule, that that is best for us, which is best for our souls; and therefore it is our interest to go with those, and be with those, with whom God is, Zech. viii. 23. When Lot was to chuse a habitation, he was determined therein purely by secular advantages, Gen. xiii. 11. 14. and God justly corrected his sensual choice, for he never had a quiet day in the Sodom he chose, till he was fired out of it. The Jewish writers tell of one of their devout Rabbins, who being courted to dwell in a place which was otherwise well accommodated, but had no synagogue near, he utterly refused to accept the invitation, and gave that text for his

reason, Psal. cxix. 72. *The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver.*

Tenthly, Let religious families keep up friendship and fellowship with each other, and as they have opportunity assist one another in doing good. The communion of churches hath always been accounted their beauty, strength, and comfort, and so is the communion of religious families. We find in many of Paul's epistles kind salutations sent to and from the houses in which religion flourished. Religious families should greet one another, visit one another, love one another, pray for one another, and as becomes households of faith, do all the good they can one to another, so far as they all meet now daily at the same throne of grace, and hope to meet shortly at the same throne of glory; to be no more, as they are now, divided in Jacob, and scattered in Israel.

Lastly, Is religion, in the power of it, uppermost in your houses? And are you and yours serving the Lord, serving him daily? Go on and prosper, for the Lord is with you, while you be with him. See your houses under the protection and blessing of heaven, and be assured, that all things shall work together for good to you. Make it appear by your holy cheerfulness, that you find God a good Master, wisdom's ways pleasantness, and her paths peace; and that you see no reason to envy those that spend their days in carnal mirth, for you are acquainted with better pleasures, than any they can pretend to.

Are your houses on earth God's houses? Are they dedicated to him, and employed for him? Be of good comfort, his house in heaven shall be yours shortly: *In my Father's house there are many mansions*; and one you may be sure for each of you that thus, *by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour and immortality.*

PARLOUR RELIGION EXEMPLIFIED.

THOSE to whom the Lord has given a plenty of the good things of this world, have it in their power to anticipate something of the employments and enjoyments of heaven, so far as the imperfection of the present state will permit; for they have all things richly to enjoy, they may chuse their company, their time, and entertainments, and in all things follow the pious disposition of their hearts. It is an happiness for a religious man to visit, or to be in a house, that has a good man at its head. Such a house is that of Honorio.

In the morning the parlour is decently prepared, and warmed for the reception of the pious heads of the family, who come from their chamber smiling with gratitude to God, and good-humoured with their diligent servants. The little family during their infancy are in the nursery, and every thing that might interrupt, is prohibited from entering the parlour, which is at this hour a chapel for devotion. The clock having struck the well-known hour, Honorio and his beloved wife are seated, with the Book of God before them; the servants enter with looks expressive of the happiness they feel in having the privilege of being God's freemen, and joining their master and mistress in his service. Under the direction of Honorio, a song of praise to God for his mercies is offered up, and a portion of scripture is read, that their minds may become more familiarly acquainted with the sacred oracles. This being done, they all bow their knees to him by whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, and the good Honorio calls upon his Lord and Master in heaven, with expressions of profound homage and humility; blessing him for the favours of the past night, and the pleasure of seeing the light of the returning day. Like the great High-priest he bears on his heart all his family before God, and entreats for particular mercies, according to the known state of his

household, and puts himself and all his affairs, both temporal and spiritual, into the hands of his heavenly Father. He then gives them his benediction, and they all rise. The happy servants, cheered and warmed with the aids of devotion, return to their duty, each according to his place, and the heads of the family with their guests (if such are present), sit down to breakfast on the overflowing bounty of God's providence. Business, or works of piety, call the master away, and the mistress, having given directions in her family, takes her usual seat and employment in her parlour. The Bible is laid near her, to be referred to as her best friend and director, her richest cordial in trouble, and most faithful monitor in doubtful cases. Nor is she fearful that any visitor should find her with this companion, for she desires no company but those who love the scriptures. She is rather of the sentiments of a well-known female, who brought her family-bible into her parlour, and laying it on the table, said, "Lie there, thou best of books, and keep thou thy place whoever comes in." A pious visitor or two, or a minister of Christ perhaps, drops in, in the forenoon. If so, the time is not wasted in unprofitable talk, but the parlour is honoured by being changed into the similitude of the holy mount. This heavenly woman and her guests enter into discourse, as Moses and Elias did, on what once passed at Jerusalem, when Jesus gave his life a ransom for many; and their experience so confirms their interest in that work of love, that their hearts burn within them, and, like Peter, they find it good to be there.

The hour to dine being come, Honorio returns, and probably brings a religious friend or two to his hospitable mansion. The table being spread with plenty, without ostentation, the provision is sanctified by the prayer of Honorio, penetrated with a sense of having forfeited every thing by sin, but having recovered all by the merit of his great Saviour, a remembrance of whose love makes every thing more sweet and refreshing. Having used, but not abused, the bounties of providence, grateful acknowledgments are returned to the great Giver of every good gift; and the pious few mingle profitable discourse with their wine, or concert some plan for sup-

plying the wants of those who are in distressing circumstances. Towards evening, a select company grace the tea-table; and the interests of the gospel, with the best means of spreading its influence around them, become the subjects of their conversation. Should national affairs be introduced, they express their loyalty towards their lawful sovereign, and their thankfulness to God for the many invaluable privileges enjoyed by Britons. The hour of parting being come, the praises of God introduce the devotion of the evening, in which, as in the morning, the Scriptures are read, and all the family called to unite. Care is taken not to protract this service to an immoderate length, lest the children on account of their tender years, and the servants, wearied with the labour of the day, might be inclined to sleep when their minds ought to be attentive. Nor is it hurried over, as though it were of no importance; but sufficient time is taken reverently and decently to thank God for his goodness, earnestly to intreat him to pardon their sins, and to commit themselves into his care and protection.

O ye worldlings! what can ye produce in the scenes of your lives that is worthy to be compared with this? "The curse of God," says the scripture, "is in the dwellings of the wicked." Your parlours have no blessings in them. Your children and servants never hear the name of God mentioned in them, unless it be to blaspheme it. Your tables are unblest. At your banquets, intemperance reigns, and modesty is put to the blush. The parlours I have been describing are types of heaven, where due returns are made to God for his bounty. Ye are deluded by what you call rational amusements. Like children you divert yourselves in foolish play, night after night, wasting your time and substance. "And the God in whose hands your breath is, and whose are all your ways, you have not glorified." Any thing that is serious and useful to your souls, you will not once hear, much less will you hear it repeated. "And what will ye do in the end thereof?" O that ye were wise, that ye would consider your ways, and at last make some returns of gratitude to a gracious God for all his benefits bestowed upon you! **1 JA 64**

THE END.

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